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Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home

By ABC News

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Aug. 29, 2001 -- A backyard wrestler hits an opponent over the head with a fluorescent light bulb, a heavy-set wrestler leaps off a roof on top of his friend, and bodies go flying over the top rope.

A backyard audience watches the whole thing.

In small towns and suburbia, children inspired by professional wrestling are holding backyard wrestling matches. Some are also making their own home movies and posting the video on the Internet. One Web site alone lists more than 600 backyard wrestling federations, and every week the site hears from about 50 more.

A growing underground of teenage boys who just want to stomp the daylights out of each other are swapping videos and logging into chat rooms to brag about taking down their last opponent with professional wrestling moves like the "killer leg drop."

It's a movement so disturbing that the World Wrestling Federation has issued a video called Don't Try This At Home.

"Parents and children need to be wary of and leery of what they do to emulate us, because even as pros, sometimes we get hurt," said Vince McMahon, owner of the World Wrestling Federation. "And they need to be very, very careful about what they do."

Good Morning America's parenting contributor Ann Pleshette Murphy said boys are particularly prone to macho activities like wrestling, and that it is difficult to keep them from roughing each other up. But she disagreed with the backyard wrestlers' claims that their pastime keeps them away from other trouble, such as drugs or alcohol.

"Plenty of research shows that violent, aggressive behavior in kids correlates with other destructive behavior," Murphy said. "And yes, the kids involved in this claim to try and keep from hurting other kids, but the bottom line is this is violent, creepy behavior."

Potential for Injuries

Doctors have said that the backyard wrestlers have potential for serious injuries, including head injuries, brain damage, spine injury and paralysis. Nearly two dozen professional wrestlers have been killed since 1995. And one Chicago teen was left paralyzed after trying a professional wrestling move.

Just the same, kids as young as 14 star in videos like Friday Massacre, distributed over one of the Web sites. Like their heroes on cable TV, the real crowd-pleasers take the biggest risks. At one match, 260-pound Nicholas Teal jumped off a roof onto his pal André. No one was hurt.

But the crowd wanted blood, so Teal scraped a cheese-grater across André's skull.

"You see the blood dripping down my forehead? That's 100 percent real," said Teal. "That's as real as it gets."

There are no referees at these matches, or at least not any real ones. There are also no medics and especially no parents. There is no one to say "stop" when those daredevil leaps threaten to bruise more than a teenager's ego.

And there's not much law enforcement can do about the matches either, unless the organizers charge admission money or gamble.

Murphy says that if your children watch professional wrestling on television, parents should sit down with them and point out that what they are seeing is choreographed, and that there are public service announcements to not try it at home.

If your teen is already involved in the matches, parents should forbid highly dangerous activities and at least have someone with wrestling

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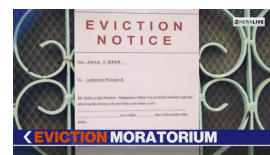


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experience or a group of parents supervise the events, Murphy said.

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